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UNHCR INSPECTION AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Over the past year the scope of oversight-related work performed by the Inspection and Evaluation Service (IES) has increased, in accordance with emphases of Project Delphi and the new Operations Management System (OMS). Along with the expansion of inspection missions and the continuation of evaluations, a new investigation function was created, with IES designated as its central focal point. The Strategy Paper for the Inspection and Evaluation service was finalized in December 1997, and provides strategic directions for IES, including an analysis of functions and structure for the oversight mechanisms of inspection, evaluation, and investigation. The UNHCR Oversight Committee, established in early 1997, has met five times over the past year, and ensures effective review and follow-up of oversight reports (including audit reports).

II. INSPECTION

2. Since the inception of the inspection function in UNHCR, twenty-five inspection missions have been carried out to sixty countries. This comes to an average of about two countries inspected every month since the first inspection in June 1995. Over the past year, inspections have focused on the major UNHCR operations, with field inspections conducted to the Great Lakes region of Africa (Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania) and former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina); other countries of former Yugoslavia are planned for inspections in the course of 1998. In addition to internal IES expertise, the Service has called upon the Division of International Protection, which has provided an experienced protection colleague for each

of the past twelve countries inspected. The Standing Committee is regularly informed of inspection activities through the updates on regional developments.

3. Recent developments: Several major initiatives have contributed to the strengthening of the inspection function in UNHCR, and to its broader acceptance throughout the organization. One element which differentiates inspection from other UNHCR activities is the compliance mechanism. Approximately three months following issuance of a final inspection report, the Director of the Inspection and Evaluation Service expects to receive information on the status of compliance with each main recommendation from the report. On the basis of the information received, the Director will prepare a compliance memorandum, indicating whether overall compliance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. An analysis of compliance with inspection recommendations for the first 55 countries inspected (22 reports) was shared with the Directors concerned and senior managers. Of the 22 reports finalized, thirteen were considered to have attained satisfactory compliance, two were partially satisfactory, and seven were still pending final compliance (having not yet reached the stage of the three-month follow-up).

4. Inspection reports and related documentation are now systematically stored in the IES inspection and evaluation database. The database allows for storage, easy retrieval, and analysis. It has facilitated the compilation of not only the compliance analysis, but also the three most recent "Inspector's Notes on Lessons Learnt":

(i) Note 3: Inspection Recommendations on Operations/Programme Management, October 1997 (prepared following a request for input to the OMS development process);

(ii) Note 4: Inspection Recommendations on Administration, Staffing and Personnel Issues, October 1997; and

(iii) Note 5: Inspection Recommendations on Overall Management, March 1998.

These Inspector's Notes were shared with the High Commissioner and members of the Senior Management Committee.

5. Inspector's Note 5 on overall management took special note of management-related recommendations appearing most frequently in inspection reports. Under the category "Policy and Strategy", there were recommendations for new guidelines on specific persons and groups of concern to UNHCR, categories of refugees (such as urban refugees, on which policy guidelines have now been prepared), and operational procedures (such as investigation). The lack of field office plans of action on various refugee groups and operational activities was highlighted as a recurring shortcoming. Many recommendations relating to office structure were also made, ranging from reinforcement to re-direction to phase-down. Numerous recommendations were made on "Managerial and Office Effectiveness". Weak areas included team cohesion, working atmosphere, and the need to strengthen overall management. The category "Coordination and External relations" produced recommendations relating to cooperation with Governments, United Nations agencies (most frequently the World Food Programme), and NGOs (including strategy,

participation in planning, and regional NGO coordination). Recommendations were also made on public information and mass information.

6. The Inspection Handbook continues to provide the philosophical and procedural basis for the preparation, conduct and follow-up of inspections. The second edition of the Handbook was produced in October 1997. It is planned to review and update the document every year, as the body of experience gained will lead to the development of improved and modified inspection techniques.

7. The addition of two inspection posts has already served to augment the overall capacity of IES. The new Senior Inspection Officer (Administration/Finance) brings this specialized expertise into inspection missions. The other post, Executive Assistant, provides multi-faceted support to IES, including focal point for the database, participation in inspection missions, assistance in evaluation follow-up, and administrative support to the Oversight Committee.

8. The scope of the inspection function will be augmented, following the request of the High Commissioner that IES undertake inspections of Headquarters' units as well as field operations in the future. In 1998 the Division of Human Resources Management will be the first such Headquarters-based unit to be inspected. Meanwhile, field-level inspections will continue, with inspections to sixteen countries planned for 1999.

9. In addition to inspections in the annual work programme, results of which are reported directly to the High Commissioner, IES is sometimes requested by the Senior Management Committee members to undertake management reviews, focusing on specific aspects of the work of some offices (including management, staffing, human relations, and financial transactions). Seven programmes either have been reviewed or are under review at the present time, with reports being transmitted to the requesting office.

III. EVALUATION

10. The evaluation function in UNHCR is in a transitional period. With the development of the OMS, evaluation is expected to increasingly centre around decentralized self-evaluation, complemented by targetted evaluations by Headquarters. This approach will help to create a culture of evaluation in UNHCR where programme managers see evaluation as one of their core responsibilities. The OMS will provide operational staff with increased expertise in organizing evaluations, which in turn will encourage them to undertake self-evaluation with partners. These new systems will permit field managers to more frequently assess the effectiveness and impact of their activities. Greater use of a decentralized system of self-evaluation will also facilitate the compilation and exchange of best practices and lessons learnt. Furthermore, it is expected to improve the quality of reporting as well as accountability and transparency. In that regard, as part of IES efforts to disseminate the results of evaluations more widely, six evaluation synopsis reports have been provided to members of the Standing Committee.

11. Recent developments: At the central level, in-depth evaluations have focused more on reviewing major activities within large operations, analysis of regional strategies and thematic evaluations. During the past year, emphasis has also been placed on evaluations in partnership with other

agencies. This has permitted evaluations to address common problems as well as facilitate cooperation and collaboration. Examples include an evaluation of emergency food assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina carried out jointly with WFP, and a tripartite study of the Great Lakes Emergency Operation undertaken with UNICEF and WFP. In addition, innovative measures have been adopted to permit organization-wide evaluations to take place with fewer staff. The recent reduction in evaluation staff resources presents a new challenge, coming at precisely the time efforts are being made to strengthen the function. During this difficult period, new ways will have to be found to staff and support the function so that evaluation can play a wider and more central role. UNHCR hopes to improve the training provided to staff working in the evaluation function, and will continue to use staff temporarily in need of placement as an evaluation resource.

12. Arising from the results of Project Delphi and anticipated requirements of the OMS, it is recognized that evaluation, as an important complement to monitoring and control in UNHCR, will have to be redefined and strengthened. A review has been approved, entitled "Enhancement of Evaluation Capacity in UNHCR", and will be funded by the Canadian Management Consultant Trust Fund.

13. Follow-up of evaluation recommendations: Evaluation follow-up has been greatly facilitated by the completion of the IES database mentioned above. Ensuring thorough follow-up on evaluations will be one of IES' priorities during the coming year. Major efforts were made to implement the various recommendations contained in the reviews cited below.

A. Review of Staff Stress and Security

14. The Senior Management Committee directed DHRM to form a permanent working group charged with preparing a plan of action that would address the report's many recommendations. A wide range of important initiatives has already been adopted, including training measures, increased attention to local staff security, and plans for a designated budget for security. Although concrete achievements related to stress are more difficult to identify, the report is credited with raising staff awareness and sensitivity to the issue. The Staff Counsellor has observed, for example, that following widespread distribution and discussion of the report, staff are more willing to come forward to ask for help and guidance. The recommendations have become part of DHRM's objectives, and are periodically followed up by senior management. It is expected that the evaluation will continue to influence action on security and stress issues throughout 1998.

B. Review of Implementing Arrangements and Partner Selection Procedures

15. This review has been put to use in a variety of ways. The evaluation's recommendations were broadly endorsed by the Senior Management Committee as guidelines for Headquarters and the field. In addition to familiarizing staff with the issues, documenting lessons, and providing both guidance and ideas, the report contributed to the development of a more active approach to managing relationships with NGOs, and to the introduction of an operational partnership agreement. A NGO database is also being put in place and efforts are underway to clarify responsibility and emphasize accountability relating to all aspects of financial activity between UNHCR and its partners.

C. Review of UNHCR's Refugee Education Activities

16. This evaluation helped to identify shortcomings that have led to the development of new policies and guidelines, to modify educational priorities, and to raise the profile of this important activity. To assist in implementing the new policy, approaches and standards recommended by the evaluation, guidance has been provided through technical manuals, training programmes, workshops and, where necessary, direct technical assistance. All of these efforts have been undertaken with the ultimate aim of lifting educational standards to the level recommended, particularly in primary schooling and basic education for adolescents and adults. However, present funding constraints have delayed the introduction of improved standards for refugee primary schools.

D. Evaluation of UNHCR's efforts on behalf of children and adolescents

17. Follow-up activities on this evaluation have been among the most comprehensive. In view of the global importance of the issue, a thorough review of the issues took place over the course of several meetings of the Senior Management Committee. An internal Working Group was established to review the report's recommendations and to develop a comprehensive plan of action. Thus far, the Working Group has supported the creation of regional Child Officer posts, helped advance the development of training programmes on children's rights and integrated children's issues into existing training. CMS core and managerial competencies were revised to give the issue more attention and ensure greater accountability. A strategy to prioritize and mainstream the Office's policies on children has been developed as part of the OMS, and new NGO partnerships, advocacy campaigns and protection activities have been developed. Follow-up efforts are expected to continue throughout 1998.

E. Review of UNHCR's Project Staff Arrangements

18. Offices which have project staff have been able to use the report to harmonize and improve their own arrangements. It is expected that a focal point will be established to approve and monitor the arrangements in the future. It is anticipated that many aspects of the issue will begin to be resolved following a realignment of categories and definitions and the development of common budget presentations in cooperation with a number of other agencies. These efforts were discussed at the twelfth meeting of the Standing Committee in June 1998.

F. Review of UNHCR Mass Information Activities

19. Follow up on a review of UNHCR's Mass Information Activities was dealt with at a Policy Committee meeting of senior management on the subject. As the evaluation recommended, the Policy Committee agreed on new structural arrangements for the activity and made a number of policy decisions regarding the future planning and use of the function. Taking the recommendations into account, it was also decided that the Assistant High Commissioner will issue a broad set of policy guidelines on UNHCR's mass information activities.

G. UNHCR Assistance to Older Refugees: Review and Case Studies

20. This review was recently discussed at a meeting of the Senior Management Committee, which directed the Division of Operational Support to develop a broad plan of action that will enable UNHCR to address the far-reaching recommendation contained in the report. At mid-year, the plan of action was being readied for senior management's approval. The plan would attempt to ensure that efforts that are both significant and well integrated are initiated throughout the programmes of UNHCR and those of key partners.

21. Evaluation programme for 1998: The following evaluations, approved by the High Commissioner for 1998, are presently under way:

(i) Review of UNHCR's shelter programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
(ii) Review of efforts to reorient European offices away from individual casework;
(iii) Review of Tuareg repatriation efforts;
(iv) Review of UNHCR's efforts to minimize the social and economic impact of refugees on host countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa;
(v) Review of UNHCR's training activities;
(vi) Review of compliance with UNHCR's policies regarding women, children and the environment.

IV. INVESTIGATION

22. The creation of an investigation focal point within IES represents part of UNHCR's ongoing efforts to reinforce its internal oversight mechanisms. Areas of investigatory concern to the organization include, but are not limited to, possible fraud, misuse of UNHCR funds or resources, waste or abuse of UNHCR facilities, abuse of authority or United Nations privileges, sexual harassment and other misconduct or improper conduct constituting violations of United Nations and UNHCR regulations, rules or other pertinent administrative instructions and circulars.

23. Some investigation procedures are already in place. Upon receipt of a report on such allegations, the Director of the Inspection and Evaluation Service will review it, determine whether there are grounds for investigation, and either initiate an investigation by his office or refer the matter to other Directors or units as appropriate. The Director will also liaise, as necessary and appropriate, with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in New York and the Audit Management Control Division in Geneva. The Director will monitor the results and ensure follow-up of investigations, and will establish a system for determining and reporting the closure of investigations.

24. In addition, IES was requested to examine the means and options for further strengthening UNHCR's investigative capacity. A study was therefore commissioned to especially address and make recommendations on (a) streamlining the management of the investigation function of UNHCR and (b) enhancing the organization's investigating capacity, including detection, in the framework of the wider oversight function, of situations liable to investigation. In July 1998, the report of the consultant, a former UNHCR Director of Administration, was completed and referred to concerned Directors at Headquarters for review.

25. The report outlines activities required to expand the investigation function (for example, adapt the OIOS Investigation Section Manual to UNHCR, reinforce the process for screening reports in order to identify areas for potential investigation, include investigation subjects in management training programmes, and maintain a central recording system of cases). He also recommended to put in place a consultative mechanism among concerned UNHCR entities for horizontal coordination, to identify the main outside investigative resources, including OIOS-New York, capable of assisting UNHCR in its investigations, and to create a post of Investigation Coordinator. This post has just been approved (offset by the discontinuation of another IES post). Finally, the consultant stresses the importance of commitment from Senior Management on this issue and of support from the Executive Committee to uphold the momentum. Based on the above report a detailed plan of action for enhancement of the investigation function is under preparation and will be presented shortly to the High Commissioner.